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ABSTRACT

This newsletter from the Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) first discusses The No Child Left Behind Act's strong emphasis on reading skills, in its central article, "Reading a Central Focus of No Child Left Behind Act." It explains that through the authorization of two new programs, Early Reading First (for preschool children) and Reading First (for children in grades K-3), the U.S. Department of Education intends to ensure that children, particularly children in low-performing schools and schools with high rates of poverty, have access to research-based reading programs. The newsletter then provides legislative news reviews the latest research. Other brief articles in the newsletter are: "North Dakota Distributes $2.92 Million in Federal Technology Grant Money"; "Colorado Joins Consortium to Develop English Language Proficiency Test"; and "Policy Advisory Panel Convenes to Discuss No Child Left Behind Act." Also lists resources and e-sources and offers educational information from the central region of the country. (NKA)

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McREL
Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning

changing schools
a newsletter from the central region educational laboratory

Making a difference in the quality of education and learning for all through excellence in applied research, product development and service

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Reading a Central Focus of No Child Left Behind Act

Researchers, educators, business leaders, and others have long contended that literacy is a central component of success in school and in life. Reading well in the early grades sets the stage for success in many other content areas — social studies, science, and even mathematics. Conversely, evidence suggests that students who do not learn to read well by the time they reach fourth grade are more likely to drop out prior to completing high school.

The No Child Left Behind Act places a strong emphasis on reading skills through the authorization of two new programs: Early Reading First (for preschool children) and Reading First (for children in grades K–3). These programs are intended to ensure that children, particularly children in low-performing schools and schools with high rates of poverty, have access to research-based reading programs. The U.S. Department of Education intends to distribute nearly $5 billion in funding to states and local education agencies for Reading First and Early Reading First over the course of six years.

The No Child Left Behind Act places a strong emphasis on reading skills through the authorization of two new programs: Early Reading First and Reading First.

Program Background

The Early Reading First and Reading First programs are based largely on a 2000 report by the National Reading Panel, convened by Congress in 1997 to review the available research on different approaches to teaching children to read. The panel's report, *Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction*, identifies five essential components of reading instruction: phonemic awareness (the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate individual sounds in spoken words), phonics (the relationship between letters and sounds), fluency (the ability to read text quickly, accurately, and with proper expression), vocabulary (words students must know to communicate), and text comprehension (the ability to understand what has been read).

Early Reading First

According to the U.S. Department of Education's website, the Early Reading First program was created to "address the growing concern that many of our nation's children begin kindergarten without the necessary foundation to fully benefit from formal school instruction." Local education agencies and organizations serving low-

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legislative news

Department Releases Draft Guidance for Charter Schools

In March 2003, the U.S. Department of Education released non-regulatory guidance intended to clarify how the No Child Left Behind Act impacts charter schools. This guidance adheres closely to the general regulations governing the Act. Oversight of a charter school's compliance with the provisions is relegated to the entity that originally authorized the school's charter — typically, a state board of education, district school board, university, or public agency specifically created to authorize school charters.

Although most states require charter schools to participate in state assessments, state laws vary widely in the degree of control that they offer charter schools. Under the No Child Left Behind Act, however, charter schools that receive Title I funding are required to comply with all accountability provisions laid out in each state's plan. For instance, if a charter school is identified as in need of improvement, the authorizing agency is required to provide transportation for the school's students to attend a better performing public school. This holds true even if a state's charter legislation does not provide transportation funding for charter schools themselves.

Although most of the regulations in the Act apply to charter schools as well as other public schools, there are some aspects of the guidance that defer to existing state laws. For example, some states do not currently require that charter school teachers be licensed or certified by the state. Under the legislation, charter school teachers will be required to meet the bulk of the "highly qualified teacher" provision; teachers of core academic subjects will be required to hold a bachelor's degree and demonstrate competency in the subject matter that they teach. However, unlike other public school teachers, charter school teachers do not have to be certified or licensed to teach unless their state's laws require it.

In March 2003, the U.S. Department of Education released non-regulatory guidance intended to clarify how the No Child Left Behind Act impacts charter schools.

Some charter school advocates have expressed concern that painting charter and other public schools with the same broad brush could threaten the nontraditional teaching methods that attract many parents to the charter system. Too, there is some concern that charter school authorizers may not have access to the necessary resources to adequately oversee charter schools' compliance with the Act. The draft guidance addresses this issue, advising states to refer to charter schools specifically in their accountability plans and to ensure that charter school authorizers have sufficient resources to conduct their oversight of the schools. cs

For more information:

The U.S. Charter Schools website offers a range of information for charter school developers, operators, parents, and policymakers. Included on the site is information on federal resources and a state-by-state guide to charter school legislation, key contacts, and school profiles. Link to www.uscharterschools.org/pub/uscs_docs/home.htm.

The Impact of the New Title I Requirements on Charter Schools: Non-Regulatory Guidance **(Draft Guidance, March 24, 2003) is available at www.ed.gov/offices/OII/choice/charterguidance03.doc**

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Study Documents Link Between Professional Development and Instructional Practice

Desimone, L. M., Porter, A. C., Garet, M. S., Yoon, K. S., & Birman, B. F. (2002). Effects of professional development on teachers' instruction: Results from a three-year longitudinal study. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 24*(2), 81–112.

Many educators consider teacher professional development a necessary element for successful reform. Desimone and her colleagues (2002) conducted a longitudinal study to test the link between professional development and changes in teachers' instructional practice. The researchers surveyed 207 teachers from 10 districts in five states over a period of three years.

In year 1 of the study, teachers were surveyed about the extent to which they used three standards-based practices in a specific mathematics or science class: (1) technology (e.g., calculators or computers), (2) higher order instructional methods (e.g., alternative problem-solving methods), and (3) alternative assessments (e.g., portfolios). In year 2, teachers were asked to describe the professional development activity that was particularly helpful to them in teaching that same mathematics or science class. In year 3, the survey repeated the year 1 questions about teachers' use of the practices.

The results indicated that when teachers' professional development focused on a specific practice, teachers reported more use of that practice in the year following the professional development activity. This effect occurred for mathematics as well as science classes and for both elementary and secondary teachers. In addition, four characteristics of the professional development activity influenced its impact on teachers' practice: active learning (e.g., review of student work), coherence (e.g., alignment with curriculum and standards), reform format (e.g., study groups), and collective participation by teachers. The authors interpreted the results as strong support for the connection between the content of professional development and its subsequent influence on teachers' practices.

Summarized by Patricia A. Lauer, senior researcher

Study Explores Instructional Effectiveness of CREDE Standards

Hilberg, R. S., Tharp, R. G., & DeGeest, L. (2000). The efficacy of CREDE's standards-based instruction in American Indian mathematics classrooms. *Equity and Excellence in Education, 33*(2), 32–40.

Using sociocultural theories of learning, the Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence (CREDE) developed five Standards of Effective Pedagogy:

- Joint productive activity among teachers and students
- Developing competence in language and literacy
- Contextualizing instruction in student experience and knowledge
- Challenging students toward cognitive complexity
- Teaching through conversations

To examine the instructional effectiveness of these standards, Hilberg, Tharp, and DeGeest (2000) carried out an experiment with Native American students in the southwestern United States. For the study, DeGeest taught the same unit on fractions, decimals, and percents in two eighth-grade mathematics classes. In one class, DeGeest taught using direct instruction followed by individual student practice. In the other class, DeGeest taught using CREDE's Standards for Effective Pedagogy.

Both classes were administered pre- and post-tests of mathematics achievement and attitude toward mathematics. To measure DeGeest's proficiency in using the pedagogy standards, researchers applied a rubric to a videotaped recording of DeGeest's experimental class. The rubric defined five levels of increasing proficiency for each standard: beginning, emerging, developing, enacting, and integrating. DeGeest's highest score on the rubric was in the area of challenging activities, teaching complex thinking.

At post-test, students taught in the CREDE class reported significantly greater enjoyment of mathematics and performed higher on the achievement test. Moreover, three weeks later, these students had retained significantly more content. This finding suggests that it would be worth developing a full research study to test the CREDE approach.

Summarized by Helen S. Apthorp, principal researcher

North Dakota Distributes $2.92 Million in Federal Technology Grant Money

The No Child Left Behind Act authorizes a number of grant programs targeted toward improving student achievement. One such program is Enhancing Education through Technology, which, through an annual grant application process, provides funding to help states improve student achievement through the use of technology.

The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (DPI), which has long advocated the use of technology as a school improvement tool, recently distributed its 2002–2003 federal grant funding to districts and schools in the state. Half of the $2.92 million allotted to the state for the 2002–2003 school year was distributed to districts based on a Title I funding formula; the remainder, $1.46 million, was awarded to nine high-needs schools as a result of a competitive grant process. Although the money was allocated for the 2002–2003 school year, under federal rules schools have until September 2004 to obligate the funding.

To be eligible to apply for a portion of the competitively granted funding, schools were required to meet at least one of three criteria: (1) be identified for Title I Program Improvement; (2) have 50 percent or more of students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch; or (3) have 40 percent or more of students classified as at or below the federal poverty line. Based on these criteria, DPI developed a list of 64 schools that were eligible to apply for the funding. Schools not included on the list were permitted to partner with eligible schools and apply for funding. Applications of this type had to show that the proposed partnership would result in the eligible school receiving the most benefit from the partnership.

Schools were asked to address the goals of Title II Part D of the No Child Left Behind Act, as well as the legislation's overall goals. To encourage schools to think in terms of long-term technology plans rather than quick fixes, DPI set the minimum grant allotment at $70,000. Grants allocated to the nine schools ranged from $95,398 to $293,289.

In March 2003, the applications were reviewed by a team of educational technology experts from North Dakota. "When we conducted the evaluations, we were looking for evidence that the schools were serious about using technology to influence student achievement," notes Christopher Kalash, Title II Part D program administrator. "Setting a minimum grant level ensured that the applications were well-reasoned and thoughtful. Otherwise, schools might have been tempted to apply for $25,000 to replace their computers, which in itself won't lead to long-term improvement."

At least 25 percent of each school's grant must be used for professional development in education technology. Other approved uses of the funding include using technology to foster student, parent, and teacher communication; acquiring new technology to support school reforms; and providing increased accessibility to technology within the schools.

In order to determine whether schools' proposed programs are having a discernable impact on student achievement, DPI is working with EduTech, a North Dakota organization, to collect baseline data from the nine schools receiving grants. After the proposed programs have been in place for a year, EduTech will collect additional data in order to conduct an analysis of the plans' impact.

Colorado Joins Consortium to Develop English Language Proficiency Test

As part of the No Child Left Behind Act, states are required to test limited English proficient (LEP) students not only on the state's academic standards, but also on students' English language proficiency. Many states, including Colorado, currently use off-the-shelf assessments as a means of gauging LEP students' language proficiency. But because these tests do not meet the requirements set forth under the Act, states are now charged with developing new language proficiency assessments.

In draft non-regulatory guidance released in late February 2003, the U.S. Department of Education further clarified the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act relative to English language proficiency requirements. Although states are not required to use a single, statewide test to determine English language proficiency, they are strongly encouraged to do so. The Department sets rigorous standards for local assessments should states choose to use them.

As is the case with many of the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, Colorado appears to be ahead of the curve. Colorado already has created a set of English language development standards, which will be published in the fall of 2003. In addition, the Colorado Department of Education has joined with other state departments of education to form the Mountain West consortium. The consortium members — Alaska, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, Utah, and Wyoming — partnered with New Hampshire-based Measured Progress, a nonprofit education organization that creates customized assessment tools, to write a grant proposal for assessment development funding from the U.S. Department of Education. The consortium was awarded $1.89 million in funding, which will be used to support the development of a language proficiency assessment for all preK–12th grade levels. Each consortium member has appointed a steering and leadership committee of experts in assessment and content issues to lead the assessment development process.

According to Flora Lenhart, English Language Acquisition Unit Director for Colorado, the new assessment will provide data not currently available from off-the-shelf tests since it "will comprehensively focus on all five domains of language specified by the No Child Left Behind Act: reading, writing, speaking, listening, and comprehension." The test will integrate language proficiency development with grade-level expectations. The end result, according to Lenhart, is a test that will measure students' growth in English language proficiency over time. Current tests typically inform classification and placement decisions, Lenhart notes, rather than measure individual student progress.

The consortium has created a framework for the development of the assessment, and plans to meet in June to iron out the specifics of the test. Two test runs are scheduled: pilot-testing in March 2004 and field-testing in September 2004. Statewide testing for all consortium participants is scheduled to begin no later than spring 2005.

"This is an innovative action on the part of the states," Lenhart points out. "We're looking forward to having a reliable and meaningful assessment that will measure students' growth over time."

For more information, link to www.cde.state.co.us or contact Flora Lenhart at 303.866.6729.

essential resources

Leadership Folio Series: Sustaining School Improvement (2003)

by McREL. Available in pdf format at www.mcrel.org

Initiating change is not easy, but sustaining the improvements that result from change can be even harder. *Leadership Folio Series: Sustaining School Improvement* is intended to help school leadership teams — teachers, administrators, and other school leaders — deal with the complexity of change by explaining what it takes to sustain improvement and by providing guidelines for addressing the factors that affect the ability to do so. Topics covered in this folio series include professional development, communication, data-driven decision making, professional learning communities, and resource allocation.

Classroom Instruction that Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement (2001)

by Robert J. Marzano, Debra J. Pickering, and Jane E. Pollock, 178 pages. Available through ASCD at www.ascd.org

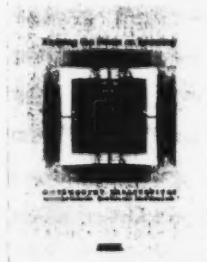
Research and practice come together in *Classroom Instruction that Works*. Designed specifically for K–12 educators, this guidebook is organized around nine categories of instructional strategies that have the greatest likelihood of positively influencing student learning. For each strategy, suggestions, classroom examples, and summaries of relevant research findings are included.

Helping At-Risk Students Meet Standards: A Synthesis of Evidence-Based Classroom Practices (2002)

by Zoe Barley, Patricia A. Lauer, Sheila A. Arens, Helen S. Apthorp, Kerry S. Englert, David Snow, and Motoko Akiba, 125 pages. Available in pdf format at www.mcrel.org

To help all children achieve at high levels, teachers need access to classroom practices that target children who are low performing or at risk of failure. This research synthesis reviews evidence on the use of five strategies to help low-achieving students meet standards: cognitively oriented instruction, heterogeneous grouping structures, tutoring, peer tutoring, and computer-assisted instruction.

Noteworthy Perspectives: Keeping the Focus on Learning (2002)



by Barbara B. Gaddy, Ceri B. Dean, and John S. Kendall, 44 pages. Available in pdf format at www.mcrel.org

Creating standards-based education systems is a challenging endeavor — one that has become more critical in light of the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act. *Noteworthy Perspectives: Keeping the Focus on Learning* offers information that is useful for understanding some of the key issues that must be dealt with at the district, school, and classroom levels — developing a clear, specific, and complete view of what students are to learn and ensuring that curricula, instruction, and assessments are aligned with standards and support the learning process.

Shapes, Shapes Everywhere! (2002)

by Sandra Gilpin, 81 pages. Available in pdf format at www.mcrel.org

This second- and third-grade nine-lesson unit integrates multiple mathematics benchmarks in order to deepen students' understanding of two- and three-dimensional shapes and their properties. The unit builds on children's informal knowledge by giving them vocabulary and opportunities to practice identifying geometric shapes. At the beginning of each unit, students have an opportunity to set their own goals; at the conclusion of each lesson, suggestions are given for formal and informal assessments.

To obtain hard copies of these or other McREL publications, contact McREL's Resource Center at 303.337.0990.

e-sources

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's newly redesigned website offers a variety of publications and products designed to equip educators with the information, resources, and guidance they need to help all students succeed. The site also offers links to resources on a variety of education topics. For resources related to assessment and accountability, curriculum, instruction, leadership, literacy, and more, link to **www.mcrel.org**.

National Charter School Clearinghouse

The National Charter School Clearinghouse acts as a resource to the charter school community by providing a number of products and services. Among these is a database of grant writers, online forum discussions, and publications such as journals and newsletters. For more information, link to **www.ncsc.info/**.

National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs

The National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs (NCELA) is funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement & Academic Achievement for Limited English Proficient Students. NCELA defines its mission as one of collecting, analyzing, and disseminating information relating to the effective education of linguistically and culturally diverse learners in the U.S. NCELA is operated by The George Washington University, Graduate School of Education and Human Development, Institute for Education Policy Studies. Go to **www.ncela.gwu.edu**.

United States Department of Education, Reading First Site

The U.S. Department of Education's Reading First website offers a variety of information on the No Child Left Behind Act's Reading First program, including a description of how the program works, an overview of the grant requirements, and links to additional publications and resources. Link to **www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/readingfirst/index.html**.

The Partnership for Reading

Authorized by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the Partnership for Reading is a joint effort by three federal agencies — the National Institute for Literacy, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, and the U.S. Department of Education — to disseminate evidence-based reading research to educators, parents, and other community members. Among the partnership's stated goals are to develop awareness of available resources, encourage educators and others to learn more about research findings, and assist schools in developing professional cultures that put research into practice. Link to **www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading/**.

policy briefs

No Child Left Behind: Realizing the Vision (April 2003), 8 pages

by Louis Cicchinelli, Barbara Gaddy, Laura Lefkowits, and Kirsten Miller

Since the No Child Left Behind Act became law , educators and policymakers in nearly every state have been scrambling to meet the Act's requirements. But if the intent of the Act — to increase and sustain high levels of student achievement — is to be reached, states need to move beyond merely complying with the Act's provisions. This brief considers how thoughtful implementation of four key aspects of the Act — accountability and testing, flexible use of resources, school choice, and quality teachers and quality teaching — can move schools closer, not simply to compliance, but to raising achievement for all students.

The Reauthorization of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act: Moving Toward a More Unified System (April 2002), 8 pages

by Barbara Gaddy, Brian McNulty, and Tim Waters

As legislators prepare to reauthorize the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the debate over its provisions has intensified. This brief addresses the unintended consequences of the original legislation, and maintains that students will be better served by a more unified system of education in which special education is an integral component of school improvement, rather than a separate program. Among other topics, the brief explores the important roles of funding, accountability, and teacher and administrator capacity in the education of children with disabilities.

These briefs and others are available at www.mcrel.org/topics/policyBrief.asp.

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Reading a Central Focus *continued from page 1*

income children apply directly for grant funding from the Department. Early Reading First applicants must submit a pre-application to the U.S. Department of Education; after review, the Department invites applicants meeting its criteria to submit full applications.

Reading First

Reading First funding is awarded to states on a grant basis. To receive Reading First funding, a state must submit a comprehensive application to the U.S. Department of Education. Unlike Early Reading First, districts cannot apply directly to the Department for funding; instead, states distribute funding to districts on a competitive subgrant basis. Under the legislation, at least 80 percent of the Reading First grant funding awarded to states must be distributed to districts in this way. State education agencies may set aside 20 percent of their total allocation for professional development, technical assistance, and administration and reporting. That funding is not as strictly targeted as the subgrant funding. For example, professional development activities conducted by state education agencies are not limited to schools eligible for Reading First subgrants.

State applications for funding must satisfactorily meet an extensive list of criteria before the Department will award funding. Among other requirements, a state application must detail the state's plans for improving reading instruction; demonstrate how the subgrant selection process will result in districts using instructional strategies and programs that teach the five essential components of reading instruction; and describe how the state will coordinate Reading First with other literacy programs in the state.

One requirement that permeates the application criteria is that states must demonstrate that district subgrant recipients will use the funding for "scientifically based" materials, professional development, and instruction. This requirement has raised concerns that grant applicants will be limited to using a few commercial reading programs, which some say is proof of an increasing federal influence over state curricula. Although Section 1905 of the No Child Left Behind Act states that federal officials may not "mandate, direct, or control a State, local educational agency, or school's specific instructional content, academic achievement standards and assessments, curriculum, or program of instruction," critics argue that the specificity of Reading First's requirements does just that. Others contend, however, that the scientific research base for what works in reading instruction is well established, and that Reading First simply brings to the forefront specific strategies that schools should use to combat sub-average reading achievement.

According to Gail Burkett, Reading First program administrator for the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, there are several criteria districts in all states must meet to be eligible to receive an award. Eligible districts are those that receive Title I funding; serve students in kindergarten through grade three; have a high number of students reading below grade level; and have high student poverty levels. In North Dakota, all subgrant applicants must meet each standard in the state's scoring rubric to be funded. Districts meeting all criteria and scoring highest on the rubric will receive funding first.

Applications are reviewed on a rolling basis by a panel of research experts from universities across the nation, teachers, school administrators, and representatives of education organizations. Burkett advises state education officials who are currently involved in preparing a federal application to read as much information as they can on the Reading First program, pay close attention to the U.S. Department of Education's requirements, and read other states' proposals. Still, she notes, because of the sheer complexity of the process, states should be prepared for requests for resubmissions. The results of the initial reviews attest to the rigor of the process: of the 40 states that applied for Reading First grants as of October 2002, just 11 received funding approval. The rest were asked to revise and resubmit their proposals. At press time, 32 states have had their Reading First proposals approved, for a total first-year funding level of $622.5 million.

To achieve the aims of the Early Reading First grant, Big Horn School District #1 in Wyoming will implement McREL's Scaffolding Early Literacy program. McREL will provide professional development and technical assistance to help increase teacher knowledge and student outcomes in critical early literacy skills. To learn more about McREL's Scaffolding Early Literacy program, visit www.mcrel.org/programs/literacy/ela/

For further information on Early Reading First, see www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/earlyreading/index.html

For further information on Reading First, including guidance for applicants, see www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/readingfirst/

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Policy Advisory Panel Convenes to Discuss No Child Left Behind Act

In March 2003, McREL's Policy Advisory Panel convened in Denver to discuss standards-based education and the No Child Left Behind Act. Established in 2000, the panel assists McREL with its efforts to build capacity among state and local education policy leaders to advance research-based education reforms in the Central Region states. The panel also is charged with enhancing McREL's ability to identify and meet the needs of state and local policymakers in the region. The panel currently includes two members from each state in the seven-state Central Region: one member of each state board of education and the executive director of each state's association of school boards.

At the March 26th evening session, participants shared their perspectives about the current education and political landscape in their states and challenges that lie ahead. The following day consisted of presentations, discussion, and work sessions. During the two-day meeting, participants also critiqued a draft of an issues brief prepared by McREL in conjunction with its work on engaging the general public to ensure that all children meet high standards.

McREL's Policy Advisory Panel assists McREL with its efforts to build capacity among state and local education policy leaders to advance research-based education reforms in the Central Region states. The panel also is charged with enhancing McREL's ability to identify and meet the needs of state and local policymakers in the region.

A highlight of the meeting was a small-group discussion about the No Child Left Behind Act, during which participants were asked to reflect on the following questions: (1) What will it take to implement the law, and what can McREL and other similar organizations do to help? and (2) In addition to the law, what policy issues should be considered in order to increase the likelihood of reaching the goals inherent in the Act?

Participants generated ideas about the kinds of support needed in their states to effectively implement the law. Areas of need include assistance with recruitment and retention of highly qualified teachers, especially in rural areas; additional personnel and/or technology for remedial services for low-performing students; additional funding for new student tests and supplemental services; assistance in engaging parents; research and development on effective instruction for low-performing students and on the effective use of technology for instruction; and assistance in identifying and clarifying the public's expectations for schools.

Participants also offered a variety of ideas about policy changes that should be considered to increase the likelihood of realizing the vision of the No Child Left Behind Act, including suggestions regarding teacher quality and resource allocation. In addition, participants discussed how the legislation will impact local control of schools.

Following the small-group discussions, McREL Senior Researcher Pat Lauer shared the results of a collaborative project McREL is engaged in with the Education Commission of the States. The purpose of the project is to develop an online tool that helps policymakers understand the basics of scientific research and their application to the field of education. Lauer walked participants through a draft outline of the website, demonstrating anticipated navigation tools. Participants offered valuable feedback about the tool's quality, relevance, and utility for state and local policymakers, which McREL is using to strengthen the tool.

The panel's next meeting is scheduled to take place in Denver in August 2003.

the central region scene

colorado

Gov. Bill Owens has signed House Bill 1160, the first school voucher bill passed in the United States since a June 2002 Supreme Court decision ruled that school vouchers do not violate the U.S. Constitution's establishment clause. The bill, sponsored by Rep. Nancy Spence (R-Centennial), will allow low-income children in low-performing schools to receive vouchers to attend private schools. To qualify, students also must be eligible to participate in the free or reduced-price lunch program. The program is slated to begin in fall 2004, though some voucher opponents have indicated that they will challenge the law in court, claiming that it illegally diverts public school funds to private and religious schools.

kansas

The U.S. Department of Education has announced that Kansas's state accountability plan, required by the No Child Left Behind Act, has been approved. Among other components, the plan includes information regarding the revision of the state's standards and assessment system to include assessments of mathematics and reading in each of grades 3-8 as well as at least one grade in high school. Kansas is the eighth state in the nation to have its plan approved; other state plans that have won federal approval include Colorado, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New York, and Ohio. Kansas's plan, along with the other state plans approved by the department, is available online at www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/CFP/csas/index.html.

missouri

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has singled out six Missouri school districts for implementing high-quality staff professional development programs: Blue Springs, Cabool, Fulton, Lee's Summit, Lindbergh, and Mound City. In March 2003, Commissioner of Education D. Kent King presented the districts with the Commissioner's Award of Excellence for Professional Development.

nebraska

Under a budget proposed by Gov. Mike Johanns, state aid to education and special education would be cut by $332 million over two years. An alternate plan drafted by the state legislature's appropriations committee would lead to $118 million in education funding cuts within the same time frame. According to the *Lincoln Journal Star*, Lincoln Public Schools would lose $14.5 million in funding next year under the governor's budget vs. $5 million under the committee's proposal.

north dakota

North Dakota has been awarded a $2.1 million Reading First grant to help improve reading achievement in the state. Funding will be subgranted to school districts through a competitive process. Selected districts will receive three-year grants. Annual funding will depend on evidence that the districts are improving students' reading achievement in first through third grades. Following the first grant period, districts will be eligible to apply for a second three-year grant.

south dakota

Gov. Mike Rounds has signed into law SB 40, which establishes a single, statewide school accountability system in South Dakota. The legislation aligns South Dakota state law with the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, requiring that students demonstrate adequate yearly progress in reading and mathematics as measured by state assessments. The legislation gives the South Dakota Board of Education the leeway to determine what constitutes adequate yearly progress and how to measure it, among other administrative duties. The full text of the state law is available online at http://legis.state.sd.us/sessions/2003/bills/SB40enr.pdf.

wyoming

The Wyoming Department of Education underwent a reorganization effective April 1, 2003. Four new divisions have been established within the department: Policy and Governance, Educational Quality and Accountability, Administration and Internal Operations, and Assessment and Special Programs. Each division will have its own deputy superintendent, raising the total number of deputies in the department from one to four. No employees will lose their jobs as a result of the reorganization, although duties may be reassigned.

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South Dakota's Dianna Miller, a McREL board member since 2002, brings a valuable blend of political and classroom teaching experience to her board service.

After graduating from South Dakota State University in 1972, Dianna spent eight years teaching in South Dakota high schools. In 1981, she became president of the South Dakota Education Association (SDEA), where she gained a great deal of leadership experience guiding board and committee meetings and representing the association at both the state and national level.

Dianna's political experience has spanned a number of roles. After her term as president of SDEA, she served as South Dakota's deputy secretary for Game, Fish, and Parks, as well as Gov. Janklow's chief of staff. She also has worked as a lobbyist for a number of organizations, including the ESD + 6 Association, an organization made up of the 14 largest schools in South Dakota. She also currently serves as executive director of the South Dakota Mining Association.

Dianna notes that her political career offers her a unique opportunity to effect change in the education system. "Education is my first love," she says, "and my political career allows me to work with the legislature on a number of education issues. It's exciting to have the opportunity to impact the legislative process."

Her commitment to education does not extend solely to the K-12 school system. Since 1997, Dianna has served as an educational coordinator for the South Dakota Department of Corrections. In that capacity, she advises the department on the education program for each site, coordinates education efforts between sites, writes grants, and directs curriculum efforts. "This service provides an opportunity for people to turn their lives around," Dianna notes. "It's a natural extension of my teaching career."

Although Dianna was familiar with McREL's work prior to joining McREL's board, she appreciates the "bird's eye view" she gets as a board member. McREL has a particularly important role to play, Dianna believes, in this era of new accountability measures coupled with state budget crunches. "States are faced with huge challenges. They need to comply with accountability measures and continue funding their own education priorities," she notes. "When budget cuts are inevitable, 'frills' are the first to go. Nothing in education is a frill, but educators and policymakers do have to prioritize. McREL can help us do that."

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chan schools

summer 2003

a newsletter from the central region educational laboratory

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